

The Family of Christ.

A SERMON

PREACHED IN

ST. PAUL'S CHURCH, BROOKLINE, ON TRINITY
SUNDAY, JUNE 8, 1873,

BY

WILLIAM WILBERFORCE NEWTON,
RECTOR.

PUBLISHED BY THE VESTRY.

BOSTON:

PRESS OF T. R. MARVIN AND SON, 27 CORNHILL.

1873.

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AT an informal meeting of the members of the Wardens and Vestry of St. Paul's Church, in Brookline, holden on Sunday the twentieth day of July, A. D. 1873, it was

Moved, That the Reverend William Wilberforce Newton, our Rector, be requested to give us a copy of his Sermon, preached on Trinity Sunday morning, for publication and distribution ; it being our belief that it is calculated to do much good, both in our own Parish and in other parts of the Diocese.

WILLIAM ASPINWALL,
Clerk of St. Paul's, Brookline.

BROOKLINE, *August 3, 1873.*

To WM. ASPINWALL, Esq., Clerk of St. Paul's Church.

MY DEAR SIR,— I herewith send you the Sermon which the Vestry have asked for, preached upon Trinity Sunday last.

It was written only with reference to ~~our~~ own Parish : but if my friends think there is anything in it calculated to do good to others, it is entirely at your disposal.

Very sincerely yours,

WM. WILBERFORCE NEWTON.

THE FAMILY OF CHRIST.

EPHESIANS III. 14, 16.

THE FATHER OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST, OF WHOM THE WHOLE FAMILY IN HEAVEN AND EARTH IS NAMED.

IT has been my custom since I have been with you, to present upon Trinity Sunday, the report of this parish for the year past, and to preach a sermon upon the condition of our Church and its needs. In accordance with this plan, I call your attention this morning to the words which I have taken for my text, and shall claim your indulgence if in the complete examination of them I am somewhat longer than usual.

In these words of our text, St. Paul is explaining to the Ephesian Christians the purpose of God in revealing Christ to the world. He tells them that he himself was called to be the apostle to the Gentiles, in order that he might reveal the eternal purpose of Christ, and make known the mystery which had been so long hid from the world. Then he goes on to show that his own entire life is spent in efforts for their spiritual good; for them he lives and labors, for them he hopes and prays. And, in a passing parenthesis, he throws out this sentence of our text: "Wherefore," he says, "I desire that ye faint not at my tribulations for you, which is your glory. For

this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man." It is, then, in a merely passing sentence, that this thought of the Church as a family is thrown out, and this parenthesis itself is soon lost in the other thoughts which come flocking in its train.

The word here used for family, has, by its etymology, the meaning of citizenship on the basis of a common family headship. It is the thought of fatherland, that which begets in a man the sense of patriotism. It is not the mere selfish citizenship of common advantage ; it is a citizenship with hearth and home and altar and God, all impelling a man to do his best and his utmost for those who are dearest to him.

Professor Maurice, in his "Lectures on Social Morality," delivered before the University of Cambridge, in England, shows that all national and universal morality has been developed from the idea of the family ; that all the ethics of moral philosophy are traceable to the root principles which are taught to govern the home circle. In other words, the nation and the Church are the outgrowths of the family.

This idea of the family of God has been an inspiration both to the Pagan and the Christian mind. The last vision of St. John, in his wondrous Revelation, is of this new heaven and new earth taking the place of the old: " I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of

God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be with them, and be their God."

I propose, then, to take this thought of the Church of Christ as a family, and consider it in its relations to its Head, to its brethren, and itself. Here we shall find opportunities enough for us all, in this three-fold division of our common duties and responsibilities — our duties to our God, our duties to our brethren, and our duties to ourselves.

I said, first, our duties to God! This includes all our relations of responsibility to the Divine Head of the family, "The Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named."

I think our duties to the Head of the family are threefold. We owe to Him whose name we bear, and from whom we sprang, the obligation of truthfulness, holiness, and zeal.

We owe Him *truthfulness*, which is fidelity of life! When we go out into the world, and meet other men who do not acknowledge Christ as their head, we should not forget our great spiritual ancestor, or think that because others are unwilling to claim Him we can afford to keep Him at a distance, or speak of Him only with a conventional sense of reserve. That which Christ is to us in our moments of gloom, in the hour of temptation, of sin and of death, that let Him ever be to us in the blazing sunlight of worldliness, in the midday glare of business activity, and when most we are beyond the Christian family influence.

Again, we owe Him *holiness of character*, which is obedience. It is not enough that we should not be

ashamed of Him, and that we should be willing to acknowledge Christ as our head. We owe Him the convincing record, the persuasive testimony of a consecrated and obedient life. Our principles, our motives, our actions, should all be colored with that sincerity of purpose which shows itself in a faithful, loving, and obedient life; a life of trueness and of Christian integrity, a life which at once reflects in practice the profession of the faith in theory.

And yet further, we owe our Lord the element of *zeal*, or love. After our belief in Him, and our faithful, obedient following of His ways, there comes this other requisite of zeal. We must not only believe, and obey, and love; we must *want* to believe, and obey, and love; there must be an inner energy, an untiring impetus, which, like our very love of life itself, is new every morning. We must so seek and pray for that renewing Spirit of God, that we may never grow weary in our Christian duties, or outgrow our love for them! And thus if we have fidelity to Christ, which is truthfulness acted out in life; and holiness of life, which is obedience; and zeal for His cause, which is love,—we will be faithful to our Lord and Master, and will thus fulfill our first great class of duties, those which we owe to the Head of that family from whom all in heaven and in earth are named.

The second set of duties are those which we owe to our brethren. The Catechism of our Church divides our duties, as taught us by the ten commandments, into our duty to God and our duty to our neighbor. In this latter class is included and defined the third set of duties I have here put in a category

by themselves, — our duties to ourselves. Let us, then, consider our duties, as members of the family of Christ, to our brethren and our neighbors. And here I would say that we owe them the double duty of respect for their rights and privileges, and Christian charity for their opinions.

As I stand with you, my brethren, at the threshold of this subject, I feel how vast and intricate is the field before us. I feel the great difficulty of making a true and faithful analysis of our duties to others in such a mixed region as that of religious differences, where class bias, and educational bias, and surroundings, and temperament, make even children in the same nursery to differ so greatly.

We may see our duty to God and our duty to ourselves, clearly enough marked out; but it is not so easy to look out upon those who differ from us, and then draw the lines between what is essential and what is non-essential truth and error. Our feelings tend one way, it may be, in the direction of charity; our judgments tend another, in the direction of a proper and balanced discernment and perception. Of course it is the desire of the conscientious, resolute, and practical man, so to unite his feelings with his judgment, that he may strike the balance of duty; and it should also be his guerdon, by the restraining power of common sense, not to mind what people say about him, when he himself knows that he is right. And now, while not affirming anything dogmatically, or saying this opinion of mine must be true for you, because it is true for me, I would ask your attention to what I have to say upon this branch of the subject before us: our duties to our brethren.

I call those brethren, who name themselves after Christ! I call those neighbors, who have got beyond Christ's headship, and who, by an easy eclecticism, own no personal God, or every God, be it

“Jehovah — Jove — or Lord.”

The strongest kind of service we can render to these latter, is to show them by our fidelity, our obedience, and our zeal for Christ's cause, how true are His claims upon us, and how cheerfully and willingly we echo back by our obedience His commands. With reference to our brethren in Christ in other folds, as I have said, we should be tolerant, and have respect for their inalienable rights and privileges. It is not in human nature to be infallible; it is not in human nature to be clothed with the attributes of God's final, spiritual arbitrament. A Church armed with too much power becomes like the red-robed woman Babylon, drunken with the glory of the world's success. Even Christ, the great head and founder of this family, said, “My kingdom is not of this world; if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, . . . but now is my kingdom not from hence.” And again He said, “Thinnest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and He shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels?”

Look, for instance, at the long succession of intolerance and persecution, which Church history presents to us, even since the Reformation. Again and again we are impressed with the fact that the spirit of persecution rests not in the character of the creed, but deep down in the depraved and unenlightened heart of man.

The Church of England, when once free from the oppressive hand of Rome, began in turn, under Laud and Charles the First, to oppress dissenters! When the Episcopacy under Charles went down, Presbyterianism under the Parliament, persecuted Churchmen and Independents alike! When Cromwell with his Independents came into power, then it was their turn to afflict equally aristocratic Bishops and poor plebeian Quaker preachers. The Puritans in New England destroyed witches and banished Baptists with the same Jehu-like zeal! We see, then, in these different epochs of persecution, that strange mixture of zeal with human ambition and intolerance, which makes the problem of Church discipline so delicate and intricate.

Then think of the formative influence of our surroundings, our education, and our temperament, and see how all the divergent shades of human character give color to the creed. Perhaps if we had lived in the days of Whitfield and the Wesleys, when the channel of the historic Church was all clogged with dead, dry, ecclesiastical rubbish, we would have quenched our thirst from the streams which burst forth from the stopped-up main pipe, and which flowed freely and naturally forth in a channel of its own! Perhaps if we had lived after the days of Jonathan Edwards, we should have found more of the living human Saviour in the preaching of Channing, than in the theological Saviour of Puritanical Calvinism. Let us at least always remember these side causes, which have influenced those about us who differ from us.

While claiming the right of private judgment for

ourselves, and the privilege of choosing our own ground and defending ourselves upon it, let us ever have that judicious discernment and that Christian charity which will make us respected by our brethren who differ from us, simply because we in turn respect their rights and privileges.

There *is* an exclusive theory abroad, too often called *sound* Churchmanship, which implies that other religious bodies have no rights which a Churchman is bound to respect. You find this theory abroad chiefly among those zealous neophytes who, in becoming proselytes from other Christian bodies, bring us a commendable amount of zeal, but a lamentable want of knowledge! Do not let us talk about the narrowness or bigotry of others, if this be our theory of sound Churchmanship! Let us remember how this system has rent the Church in days that are gone! Let us remember that this is not the spirit of Catholicity, but the spirit of the smallest sectarianism! Let us ever remember Jacob's verdict and prophecy concerning Levi and Simeon: "O my soul, come not thou unto their secret; unto their assembly, mine honor, be not thou united: for in their anger they slew a man, and in their self-will they digged down a wall! Cursed be their anger, for it was fierce; and their wrath, for it was cruel: *I will divide them in Jacob, and scatter them in Israel!*"

I think, then, from the historical survey of this subject, from the philosophy of the case, and from the Christian view of it, that our duty towards our brethren who recognize the same historic Head, but belong to a different branch of the one family in heaven and earth, is to treat them ever with Christian charity, and with manly respect.

And then, thirdly, there are the duties which, as members of the family of our Lord Jesus Christ, we owe to ourselves ; and these duties, it seems to me, are —

A thorough understanding of our Church's position.

A thorough respect for it.

And a thorough support of it.

I say, first, a thorough understanding of our Church's position. We should always remember that our Church is still a growth of the old tree, with the dead and rotten branches lopped away ; it is not merely a new transplant of a certain branch in a certain kind of soil.

Just as the English Constitution is a growth and a development of certain legal decisions and precedents, so the English Church, from which our Church has sprung, is a growth. It is not based on a certain theory of doctrine, or on the method of administering a sacrament, alone. Theologically, it rests upon two creeds and thirty-nine articles ; ecclesiastically it is built upon the three orders of the ministry, and is called Episcopal because its method of administration and government is by a Bishop.

I have said it was a growth. Cranmer steered the Church of England through a reformation which was not a revolution, and thus preserved all that was good in the old historic Church of the centuries past, and never surrendered the possession of the house, or gave up the title deed, though the Pope at last gave up the unmanageable Anglican Church. Thus the Church still remained the Catholic, though it refused to be called the *Roman* Catholic Church any longer. Then at the Reformation-period, while Luther, and Calvin, and Melanchthon, and Zwingle, and English Non-

Conformists were rapidly making new Churches, Cranmer, Latimer, and Ridley, and after these, men like Richard Hooker, were refurnishing the old home-stead, making that house English and pure and Protestant, which had before been Romish and corrupt.

Then there sprang up two opposing schools of thought,—one which looked towards the past, and the old state of things, and one which looked towards the future, and the new; the one clung to the sacraments, the other to the preaching of the Word as the better means of grace. In the days of Elizabeth and Edward the Sixth, and afterwards under Charles the First, that party, with its high views of the Church, came forward into prominence, with old customs revived, and with new rites and ceremonies. Then came the Revolution, with Presbyterians and Independents in power, during which the claims of the once established Church of England were scattered to the four winds of heaven.

After the restoration of Charles, and the reëstablishment of the Church again, the influence of a new school of Liberalists, known as the Cambridge Platonists, was felt, who, in reacting both against Puritanism, and the undue demands of Prelacy, revived the philosophy of Plato upon a Christian basis. But soon a strange spiritual torpor came upon the Church, in the days of Queen Anne and the Georges. There was culture and classical learning abroad, but very little of that most necessary element in a Christian Church known as vital piety. It is of this period, Cowper says,—

“How oft when Paul has served us with a text,
Has Epictetus, Plato, Tully preached.”

Then came the great awakening of Methodism, making itself felt in the Evangelical movement headed by such men as Cecil, Simeon, Romaine, Bickersteth, Legh Richmond, and others. It is to this school of English Churchmanship that Canon Kingsley, himself a *Broad Churchman*, has said, England owes her missions and her charities, and that from the spiritual revival and reformation of these Evangelicals, or Low Churchmen, all the later schools of thought have derived their life. This is the school which guards the great citadel of Individualism. And then there has come another later budding of this same historic tree. The philosophy of Coleridge has reproduced itself in the Church of England, and has given an impetus to philosophical and critical study, which shows itself to-day in a third school of thought, known as *Broad Churchmanship*. As Dr. John Cotton Smith, in his late sermon before the Convention of the Diocese of New York, has truly said, "One prominent idea in the Broad Church movement is the widening of the catholicity of the Church by reducing its dogmatic basis. It protests against that traditionalism which constantly adds to the things to be believed, and is essentially a catholic, as opposed to a sectarian school. . . . Another characteristic of this school is its recognition of the importance and value of modern critical investigations." Thus, as he clearly shows, it checks both the Sacramentalism of the High Church, and the Individualism of the Evangelical School, and is in turn held back by the restraining influence of these other two parties.

And now, if any one says, Why need there be these parties? I do not like them in the Church — I would

answer in the language of a letter of the distinguished Dr. Nott, formerly President of Union College, to the late Bishop Alonzo Potter, of Pennsylvania, quoted in the discourse already mentioned: "Where there are party lines drawn in a Church, and especially where these lines are understood to be the boundary lines of great principles and convictions, no man holding an important station can maintain a perfect state of neutrality, nor can he assume to do it without eventually losing the respect of both parties, and of the community itself; for it is natural to respect men differing from us in principles more than men who are understood to have no principles at all."

Here, then, we have in this same Church, reproduced in our land, with our heterogeneous and miscellaneous society, these three tendencies towards the priestly, the pastoral, and the student types of ministry. Here we have three opposite phases of Church life, — the tendency towards institutionalism or historic continuity; the tendency towards a directly spiritual conception of our relationship to Christ, and of our whole religious life, or individualism; and the tendency towards critical inquiry and philosophical accuracy.

It is well, then, I think, to understand just how we have become what we are, and to realize the fundamental distinction between a Church based upon different schools of thought, or the different interpretations of doctrine, and a sect based only upon one separating element of belief and practice. Other branches of Christ's family may have their beauties and their secret springs of power. Ours, I think, has this, that it is catholic and wide-hearted, and that it

is historic. And it is because of its historic conservatism, that it is a power and has an influence to-day in this age and land of radicalism.

It is always a touching sight to see a hoary, venerable Church like ours laying its reverend hand upon the head of those who are fresh with the dew of their youth upon them, and calling forth the warm love and devotion of the young to be its champions and protectors. For one, I never witness the solemn ordination service of our Church without being impressed with this thought. It is like the ivy creeping round the castle tower, or the wild-flower growing on the turreted wall; the one in its massive strength protects the beauty of the other's life, and the lavish growth of ivy and the fresh hues of the tender flower adorn the hard-fought battlements, and smooth into persuasive and inviting rhetoric the wrinkled lines of its once logical and bristling front.

Then, after the thorough understanding of our Church, we owe to it the other duty of *respect* for it. We should love and honor her services, her ritual, her holy prayers, and her helpful sacraments. We should think of the many noble lives that have found comfort and repose in her communion. We should think of the many strong characters who have found in her faith and worship the truest incentives to righteousness of life.

For one, I never come into the house of God to conduct a service, without a devout feeling of thankfulness that the prayers and praises of the people do not depend upon my condition of body, mind, or spirit; that I have not, in the worship of the hour, to be thinking continually of how I am to frame sen-

tences of appeal to the mercy-seat of God, but that I, too, can pray with my brethren, and can forget everything connected with the routine of worship. I love to use these reverent and familiar words of the dear old liturgy, framed by holy men of old who spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost. This liturgical service is, indeed, a rich inheritance, transmitted to us from our fathers, which is always living and powerful, if we do but catch the spirit and breathe forth its deep, true meaning.

Again, I do not believe in a habit of apologizing for our Church, as if it needed continually to be bowed into public favor. We may find about us crude and prejudiced views and opinions with reference to it. What of this? The tribe songs of the great camp, we know, are marked by error, ignorance, pride, and prejudice. The best way to meet unkindly criticism is not by giving back the same coin in exchange, but by showing in the life and character the power of the Church, and the truth which moulds and governs and directs us. As Coleridge once truly said, "After all, it is the Christian which is the best argument for Christianity."

And still further, the method of our own Church government, with its dignity and love of order and decorum, is a ground for our respect. Our government is episcopal in form; we have as our head and chief executive officer, a Bishop. What do we mean by this? It is not that a Bishop is one who is to lord it over Christ's heritage.

We believe in a wise episcopacy, not in an unwise, infallible papacy. It is, in short, the generalship of a derived authority, which is contained in the

thought of episcopacy. For one, I love this idea of authority, as opposed to so much about us in this community which seems like a mere ecclesiastical communism.

I see our Methodist brethren in their strong and vigorous organization, long ago adopting the Episcopal form of government. I see railroad companies, and mill-corporations, and school committees appointing superintendents. I see the strength which the idea of military discipline engenders in an army,— and the Church is an army, it is not a rabble or a mob,— and it comes home to me as the wise result of mankind's widespread experience, that it is better to have one man as your executive officer, than to have an oligarchy, or any set or committee of men.

Moreover, the authority of a Bishop is a derived authority. It does not spring forth from the person of the man; it comes alone from the office in which he is placed. It is not the autocracy of a Napoleon, crowning himself; it is the authority of an officer elected by the people.

And thus, my brethren, viewing our creed, our worship, and our method of Church government, I think the second great duty we owe to our Church is, not to boast about it, but to have a great and abiding respect for it.

And then there remains the other duty, a plain and practical one for us all, the duty of supporting our Church. Just as the character of the individual students make up the general character of the University; just as the character of the citizens form the character of the community, the state, and the nation,

so the character of the parish gives tone and color to that of the Diocese and the Church at large.

I think, my brethren, that we in Massachusetts should take a bright and hopeful view of our Church, and the work which lies before us in the future. After nearly a year's waiting, after much doubt and perplexity, we have secured one to be our Bishop who will bring to his new work in this diocese the record of a faithful life of Christian stewardship. Let us pray for him, and welcome him, and strengthen his hands in every way. He leaves an important field of usefulness, and many warmly attached and devoted friends. Let us show him by every way in our power that his new field is important enough, and his friends here are strong enough to warrant him in making this great change.

May God indeed bless him in his work, and bless us in our labors; may He so send us help out of Zion that we may see Jerusalem in prosperity all the days of our life.

And now with reference to ourselves as a parish; I have already to-day, in giving out the notices, showed you some of the ways in which we can support our own Church. I have shown you just what our weak point is — just where we are cramped and limited.

When, therefore, twice a year as you look over the objects of the monthly collections, and see the word "parish," once in October and once at Easter, remember this means the pull together by which we can overcome the annual indebtedness necessarily forced upon us by the narrow limits of our Church accommodations. I long that we should do this thing all together. It is not very much to do, and

we will be the happier for doing that, which heretofore a few devoted friends have cheerfully done alone. For above every other desire I have in my work here, is this strong o'er-mastering wish, that we should be a united people's Church, on the common basis of our individual responsibility and our individual duty. That image of the Saviour's garment, and that warning of the soldiers who stood by, is the parable, image, and warning every Christian Church should always bear in mind: "Now the coat was without seam, woven from the top throughout. They said therefore among themselves, Let us not rend it."

These, then, it seems to me, are the plain and obvious lessons of this statement of St. Paul, about the whole family in heaven and on earth named after Christ.

We know very little as yet about the duties of the Church in Heaven. But here on earth the Church must remember its three great duties to its Author, to its brethren and to itself.

I. We owe to Christ, our head, the duty of fidelity, of holiness, and of zeal.

II. We owe our brethren the double duty of respect for their rights, and charity for their opinions: and

III. We owe to ourselves the duty of a thorough understanding of our Church, a thorough respect for it, and a thorough support of it.

Thus, my brethren, upon this closing feast of the Christian year, when in the presence of new faiths and opinions about us we go back to the old dog-

matic creed which has come down all the ages, and by the confession of what we sincerely believe to be the true faith, acknowledge the glory of the Eternal Trinity, and in the power of the Divine Majesty worship the Unity, — I have called your attention to this subject of our duties as the family of Christ to our head, to our brethren, and to ourselves.

I believe in preaching about Christ, rather than about philosophy ; I believe in preaching the Gospel, rather than the Church, for it is Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God, who is able to save our souls, and make them strong in Christian character. But now and then we need to go over the grounds of our belief, and see where we really stand. St. Luke, you will remember, told Theophilus that he wrote to him in order, that he might know the certainty of those very things wherein he had once been instructed. May God, who looketh at the heart, and trieth the reins, and seeth the motive as well as the act itself, own and bless whatever has been said in accordance with His will ; and may He teach us, more and more, how to be worthy children of the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named.